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PROVISIONAL SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 17th MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Wednesday, 2 July 2003, at 10 a.m.

President:	Mr. ROSENTHAL	(Guatemala)
later:	Ms. RASI (Vice-President)	(Finland)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA AND OTHER ORGANIZATIONAL MATTERS (agenda item 1) (continued)

At the invitation of the President, Mr. Hans Rosling, of the Karolinska Institute in Stockholm, gave a brief demonstration of the "World Development Chart", a new software tool developed in collaboration with, among others, the United Nations Statistical Division, which allowed users to visualize, track and compare changes in development indicators over time.

PROMOTING AN INTEGRATED APPROACH TO RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES FOR POVERTY ERADICATION AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT (agenda item 2) (continued) (E/2003/33 and 51; E/2003/NGO/1)

Mr. DRAGANOV (Observer for Bulgaria), after fully associating his delegation with the statement made by the representative of Italy on behalf of the European Union, said that the countries with economies in transition were all too often perceived as competing for aid with the developing countries, whereas in fact they were well placed to help developing countries achieve greater efficiency in their development efforts and in the utilization of official development assistance (ODA) and other resources. One important lesson to be drawn from his own country's experience was that a balance had to be found between the various policy areas, such as poverty eradication and environmental protection.

The sector-based approach to sustainable development that had been followed by many countries in the past needed to be replaced by an integrated approach, to ensure that achievements in one area did not come at the expense of harm in another. For example, Bulgaria's focus in the past on large industrial projects had created employment but had also led to serious environmental degradation and a decline in the quality of life; conversely, the abandonment of many of those projects in the 1990s had led to job losses and hardship but to only a partial recovery of the environment.

It must be remembered that poor people were usually more concerned with surviving than with the protection of their physical habitat. An integrated approach to sustainable development and partnerships between all those concerned offered the best way forward, and the current capacity of countries like Bulgaria for result-oriented cooperation in development matters should not be wasted.

Ms. WAKANA (Burundi) said that the eradication of poverty and the promotion of sustainable development in Burundi meant addressing the needs of its overwhelmingly rural population. Unfortunately, a decade of civil war had set back the country's development efforts by 15 years, causing a precipitous drop in all socio-economic indicators and leaving two thirds of the population living below the poverty line. Serious damage to the infrastructure had aggravated the problems in education and health care and the spread of HIV/AIDS and malaria had further devastated the population. Her Government's first priority was therefore to restore peace and security, and a permanent ceasefire was in sight following the signing of a peace agreement.

Peace and reconstruction would also contribute to the stability of the region as a whole. Reconstruction would include training the human resources necessary to create the wealth that would pay for education and health care for all. As Burundi did not have the resources to achieve sustainable development on its own, she urged the international community to speed up the payment of the aid promised at the signing of the peace agreement and to provide debt relief. She also called for new funding to be directed towards microfinance projects that would benefit small farmers, for the elimination of all trade barriers and for support to develop the transport infrastructure to give farmers the access they needed to international markets.

Mr. NGATJIZEKO (Observer for Namibia) outlined a number of policies adopted by his Government that were geared specifically towards addressing poverty reduction and development in rural areas. All the policies recognized the importance of rural development as an instrument for achieving national development goals and were designed to redress past imbalances in the country's development. As a result of the policies, all children of school age received free basic education, many rural villages had been given access to the national power grid or to solar energy, and new roads had been built and old ones improved.

The Government was also making progress in providing clean and safe water for the whole population, taking a coordinated approach that involved all stakeholders in order to ensure that scarce water resources were used effectively. It intended to reduce the burden of tuberculosis and malaria by promoting total quality management in health services and by decentralizing them, and it had already drastically reduced infant mortality by means of extensive immunization campaigns.

The Government was also pursuing land reform in cooperation with all other stakeholders, and legal provision had been made to ensure more equity and a fairer gender balance in access to land.

Unfortunately, the Government's efforts to promote rural development were being undermined by the HIV/AIDS pandemic, which had a disproportionate effect on the labour-intensive agricultural sector in which the vast majority of the population worked. The Government's programme to combat HIV/AIDS included awareness-raising campaigns in schools and the distribution of antiretroviral drugs, particularly to pregnant women or nursing mothers. Other obstacles to development and poverty alleviation included limited resources and the unfavourable terms of international trade, which also affected Namibia's efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

However, his Government was determined to make the most of the country's comparative advantages - its small population, good infrastructure and communications network, and political stability. Needless to say, in order to do so, it required the support of its development partners at both the bilateral and multilateral levels.

Mr. NORWAWI (Malaysia), having associated his delegation with the statement by the observer for Morocco on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said that rural development had always been given high priority in Malaysia, with the result that poverty had been cut drastically and 90 per cent of the country's population had access to electricity, clean water, schools and medical services. Agriculture was the main economic activity of the rural population and the Government was undertaking a massive programme to modernize the sector. Experience had shown that the key to success in rural development was to ensure that the delivery system was efficient and that all agencies worked together in a coordinated fashion.

In the future, the sustainability of the rural sector in general and the agricultural sector in particular would depend on developments in the negotiations within the World Trade Organization (WTO). In the past, unfortunately, hopes that the Agreement on Agriculture would bring greater liberalization in that sector had been dashed: the average global tariff on non-agricultural products was currently 4 per cent, as compared with 62 per cent on agricultural products. Despite the increase in global agricultural trade, therefore, some developing countries

had actually experienced a deterioration in their agricultural trade balance and the protectionist attitude prevailing in developed countries posed a real obstacle to rural development in developing countries.

However, tariffs were not the only barrier to trade in agriculture. Agricultural subsidies in the developed countries made agricultural products from developing countries uncompetitive in the world market and often depressed world commodity prices, reducing the incomes of the rural population in developing countries. Nevertheless, the developed countries continued to try to justify such subsidies by introducing new issues such as animal welfare and food safety standards into the WTO negotiations. While concerns about food safety and measures to control pests and diseases were in themselves quite reasonable, it was certainly no coincidence that they assumed increasing importance during negotiations on trade liberalization.

The developed countries must fulfil their obligation to provide capacity-building programmes to assist developing countries in complying with world standards and requirements for agricultural products. If the WTO negotiations were to succeed, agreement must be reached on an equitable market arrangement, and if poverty was truly to be eradicated in rural areas, Governments must ensure that their delivery systems really were effective and that rural produce had fair access to markets and was protected from unfair trade practices.

Mr. KHOSHROO (Islamic Republic of Iran), having stated that his delegation fully associated itself with the statement by the observer for Morocco on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said that one of the reasons for the limited impact of past development policies was that they had failed to take socio-economic indicators fully into account. His Government had therefore embarked on a systematic plan for sustainable rural development that paid proper attention to regional disparities, which had in the past led to serious problems connected with the migration of people from rural areas to the cities. For example, to ensure a sustainable supply of energy, it had opted for more diversified and secure sources of energy, so that electricity had been made available in about two thirds of all the villages in the country. An integrated approach pursued consistently by Governments and all the relevant international organizations was necessary if everyone in rural areas was to have sufficient food and work and access to education and health care.

The productive capacities of rural societies would flourish only if they had access to land and water, finance, technology and markets, all of which were subject to negotiations in the WTO because of their trade dimensions. Trade was vital to economic and social development, but the comparative advantages of developing countries in general, and their rural areas in particular, were in labour-intensive sectors such as agriculture, textiles and craft products, all of which were sectors highly protected by the WTO agreements. That supposedly universal and inclusive institution was becoming more protectionist by the day; special and differential treatment had never been respected, while the developed countries' massive export subsidies neutralized the comparative advantage of the developing countries. Unless such subsidies were withdrawn, jobs would continue to be lost in the rural areas of developing countries, leading to further flight from the land, with all the ensuing problems. He therefore called on Governments and international and regional organizations to implement the outcome of the current high-level segment and of the major United Nations conferences.

Mr. KIWANUKA (Uganda) said that the international community should encourage Governments to implement the MDGs through rural development. Rural development was a multidimensional and multisectoral activity, however, and the approach should be comprehensive and integrated, encompassing the whole spectrum of political, social and financial infrastructures. Although traditional economic theories identified a host of factors as being responsible for economic growth, none of them included the contribution of rural development. It was not surprising, therefore, that donors and Governments had not, in the past, seen rural development as an important engine of economic growth. It was possible to have economic growth without economic development but the reverse was virtually impossible. The economic growth of rural sectors through integrated rural development was thus the key to the achievement of the MDGs.

Peace and security should be seen as development issues. In his report on the causes of conflict and the promotion of durable peace for sustainable development in Africa (A/52/871-S/1998/318), the Secretary-General had drawn attention to the urgent need to prevent conflicts in Africa before they occurred. In Uganda, conflicts in the countryside were the source of chronic poverty and underdevelopment. Development partners played a useful role in encouraging sustainable development by building institutions for democracy and good governance. Uganda had received funds from both the United Nations Development Programme

(UNDP) and the Government of Denmark for the purposes of devolution and decentralization. The growth and development of civil society and women's organizations in Uganda owed much to the support of such donors.

Human resource development was seldom seen as important in terms of politics. However, the development of political and accountable leadership was the bedrock of democracy and social governance, both of which were essential for political stability. There was therefore a close link between the political systems of a country and its economic growth.

The agricultural sector in Africa had been described as a stalled engine. Yet agriculture remained the most important sector in terms of gross domestic product (GDP) and employment. To revolutionize agricultural production there had to be an improvement in rural infrastructure and technologies. Increased use of high-yielding seed varieties was needed as were technological inputs such as fertilizers. More attention should be paid to education and training and to the development of markets. Irrigation services and abundant supplies of water were key to the Green Revolution, as rain-fed agriculture continued to be unreliable and unpredictable. Credit at affordable rates was a must. All those aspects of development were possible, provided that there was the political will.

Mr. CARRILHO (Mozambique) said that poverty reduction and sustainable development had been and would continue to be priority goals of his Government. The integrated approach adopted in the country's Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) highlighted the importance of rural areas. Over the previous decade, Mozambique had succeeded in reaching an average growth rate of 7 per cent, albeit from a low starting point. The country had benefited from a climate of peace, the development of political democracy and a market-oriented economy. Much of the growth had taken place in the agricultural sector, due to the expansion of cultivated land. Nevertheless, the pace of development had subsequently slowed.

The current challenge was to maintain reasonable growth rates in the agricultural sector and to broaden the base of beneficiaries of such growth without depleting natural resources. The development of rural markets, agro-industries, farmers' organizations, savings and credit institutions and the devolution of power to manage their territories to rural communities were

matters of national responsibility. In that regard, his Government associated itself with the statement that had been made by the observer for Morocco on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

The international community had the responsibility to maintain and increase the solidarity it extended to developing countries in both moral and material terms. In particular, it should provide assistance to promote peace and social stability. Developed countries should agree to reduce asymmetries in trade between the rich and the poor by eliminating trade barriers. They should also agree to increase levels of ODA in order to guarantee sufficient investment in agriculture and rural development to achieve the MDGs. Global partners and individual donors should evaluate the impact of ODA and devise creative ways to overcome the problems connected therewith. In addition, an emergency programme for the poorest countries should be developed to reduce their vulnerability to natural disasters.

Mr. MAJOGO (Observer for the United Republic of Tanzania), having stated that his delegation wished to associate itself with the statement made by the observer for Morocco on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said it appreciated the report of the Secretary-General (E/2003/51), which made some useful points with regard to the challenges of poverty reduction and sustainable rural development.

Tanzania was in the process of implementing its Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP), which had been prepared in recognition of the fact that approximately 80 per cent of its population lived in rural areas and that the rural population accounted for 87 per cent of the country's poor. Much of that population had insufficient access to social services, poor infrastructure, limited access to microfinance and few opportunities to earn an income other than from agriculture. Rural development was thus crucial to his Government's efforts to reduce poverty.

In the past, mainstream development theories had placed a strong emphasis on urban development. However, the growth of the towns had taken place at the expense of the rural sector. In the 1980s, development thinking had shifted towards rural development and emphasis

had been placed on ensuring equal access to basic social services. The needs of the rural population were no longer viewed as being less important than those of the urban population. In that context, the role of the agricultural sector had become critical to the development process.

His Government, in cooperation with other stakeholders, including civil society and development partners, had developed the Rural Development and the Agricultural Sector Development Strategies to address all the dimensions of poverty reduction, focusing on the promotion of pro-poor growth, increased opportunities and access to basic services and assets for the poor, the reduction of vulnerability and adherence to the principles of good governance.

The realization of the rural development objectives set out in Tanzania's Development Vision 2025 depended largely on the rate of growth in the agricultural sector and the restructuring of the institutional framework in rural areas. Particular emphasis was being placed on increasing the involvement of local communities in decision-making activities. Attention was directed towards attaining high standards of living, an enabling environment, self-sustenance and competitiveness in international trade. Emphasis was also being placed on the provision of low-cost credit in an efficient and effective way.

Although the Tanzanian economy was currently growing at 6.2 per cent per annum, that still fell short of the 8 per cent growth required to achieve significant poverty reduction. Poverty levels were still unacceptable. Agricultural and rural development should therefore continue to be a high priority and efforts should be made to sustain the achievements that had already been made. It was also necessary to avoid duplication of efforts and competition over scant resources.

A PRSP could be an effective tool for addressing poverty reduction and rural development, provided that capacity-building took place at the local level and at the level of civil society. Opportunities for economic empowerment and support should be provided to both the rural and the urban poor, development assistance should be harmonized and problems such as external indebtedness and the absence of targets and indicators to follow up on the implementation of MDG 8 should be examined.

The challenges he had mentioned were not peculiar to Tanzania; if they were to be met in a sustainable manner, the whole international community should be involved.

Ms. Rasi (Finland), Vice-President, took the Chair.

Ms. COMINETTI (Chile), having stated that her delegation wished to associate itself with the statement made by the observer for Morocco on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said that Chile was a small country that had developed in the 1990s through a structured process based on a strategy for equitable growth. The application of a stable macroeconomic policy, the existence of an adequate level of governance and a policy of trade liberalization had enabled the country to grow at a sustainable rate of approximately 6 per cent per annum and to maintain positive growth rates in the first years of the twenty-first century, despite the volatility of the international economy. That, together with a focused and far-reaching social policy, had contributed towards a significant reduction in poverty levels.

In the 1990s, the rural sector had undergone some major changes following the adoption of policies to promote equal and universal access to basic services and infrastructure. Chile had made significant progress in terms of improving the quality of life of its rural inhabitants. There had been less success, however, in bridging the rural-urban economic gap and the division between small-scale and large-scale farmers. Her delegation thus took the view that growth alone was not enough to overcome rural poverty.

In the 1990s, social policy had acquired greater relevance, emphasis being placed on the expansion and improved targeting of social spending. In the sector of small-scale agriculture, incentives had been introduced to encourage investment in small farms through a range of credit programmes. Improvements in the quality of productive factors had been fostered including irrigation, the rehabilitation of impoverished soils, and greater use of technology. During that period, a number of programmes had been implemented with the support of multilateral institutions such as the World Bank to enhance agricultural production among the most marginalized sections of the population, including women and indigenous groups. Such programmes had also focused on local development and environmental sustainability.

Since 2000, renewed emphasis had been placed on the family farm, with the objective of adapting it to meet the new challenges arising from greater economic integration and the emergence of increasingly demanding and changing markets. Efforts had been made to promote the conditions that would allow small-scale agriculture to modernize and become more

competitive. The policy was based on a system of incentives that took into account the heterogeneity of the rural population, the principle of territoriality, market imperfections and the time factor.

A number of challenges had been encountered as a result of that policy. At the level of institutional management, for example, the challenges lay in targeting policies, improving the coordination of support to the rural sector, creating a modern institutional structure with instruments that responded both effectively and efficiently to global and market changes and evaluating the result of programmes. At the strategic level, the challenges lay in strengthening the value chain, diversifying sources of income and introducing mechanisms to stabilize prices and economic cycles, adapting the productive system of small-scale farmers to the demands of the end users, making use of the externalities of the rural environment and incorporating matters of public interest into the strategic content of the programmes.

Her Government was convinced that rural development policies helped to reduce gaps and create the conditions for the equitable enjoyment of the benefits of growth. It was therefore determined to continue to support small farmers and create the conditions necessary for them to be self-sufficient.

Mr. SKOGMO (Observer for Norway) said that the choice of topic for the high-level debate was most welcome and had already achieved its purpose. The debate had confirmed that, after several years of allowing rural development and agriculture to slip down the list of priorities, there was currently an increased awareness at both the national and the international levels that rural development and agriculture should be an engine of growth in developing countries. Assisting rural development was an effective, indeed essential, way of achieving the MDGs by 2015.

That increased awareness had also had an impact on his country's international development policy. In 2002, a group of independent experts had been commissioned to report on ways to increase the focus on agriculture in a broader development perspective. Their findings were currently being translated into policy recommendations.

As the Secretary-General pointed out in his report (E/2003/51), with ongoing efforts to liberalize trade in agriculture through the new WTO round of multilateral trade negotiations, the

international community had a chance to create new opportunities for the rural poor to prosper by pursuing broadened economic integration. The negotiations, which emphasized the liberalization of trade in agricultural and non-agricultural products, could unleash the potential for global markets to deliver the promise of development in rural areas. His Government was a staunch supporter of further trade liberalization and was fully committed to the timely fulfilment of the Doha mandate. Norway had unilaterally abolished all tariffs and quotas for all products, other than arms, from the least developed countries.

It was clear that increased international trade and investment would make an important contribution to improved economic efficiency and therefore to long-term growth and development. Nevertheless, economic growth alone was not sufficient for reaching the MDGs. Participation in a market-driven economy required access, not only to markets, but also to productive assets. Real participation in the market economy required purchasing power and private property and the very poor had neither.

He wished to highlight in particular the importance of reforming and formalizing the rights to the ownership of land to which the Peruvian economist Dr. Hernando de Soto had drawn attention in his seminal work on the issue. Women must be empowered and their participation at all levels of decision-making facilitated. Governments must be sensitive to the needs of vulnerable groups such as minorities and indigenous peoples. His delegation supported the Secretary-General's call for a cautious approach with respect to biotechnologies, particularly in the case of genetically modified crops.

He urged the international community to meet the agreed ODA and debt relief targets. Quantitative targets should also be established for meeting the objectives under the eighth MDG, concerning the formation of a global partnership. A mechanism should be set up for tracking the performance of the countries belonging to the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in pursuing those targets. His country was willing to be examined and monitored on the coherence of all of its development policies.

Mr. ATTAR (Saudi Arabia) said that the main problems hindering development in the developing countries were the unfair world trade order, the debt burden, food insecurity, and the failure of the rich countries to meet their pledges. He called upon the developed

countries to show the necessary political will to implement the Doha Development Agenda. In particular, they should put a stop to the rising tide of protectionism. Besides the extensive subsidy programmes that deprived efficient producers from developing countries of a fair market share, non-tariff barriers under the guise of environmental standards prevented exports of petroleum and other products from those same countries.

Globalization seemed to have made the challenge of eradicating poverty even more complex than before. Efforts to alleviate the debt burden must be redoubled, particularly in view of the world economic slowdown and fluctuating commodity prices. That would support the endeavours of developing countries to implement reforms with a view to ensuring the full enjoyment of economic and social rights for their peoples. At a time of increasing global interdependence, every country should adopt strategies consistent with its resources, in order to devise global solutions to the problem of food security.

The fight against poverty was hindered by the failure of the developed countries to meet their pledge to set aside 0.7 per cent of GDP for ODA. His own Government had consistently exceeded the ODA targets, providing over $76 billion worth of loans on preferential terms over recent years, in order to finance programmes relating to basic health, education and infrastructure in 72 countries. Saudi Arabia had contributed $120 million to the heavily indebted poor countries (HIPC) trust fund, and waived debts amounting to $6 billion, in line with the HIPC initiative. It was also stepping up payments to counter the increasing threat of famine in parts of Africa.

Mr. KESSEDJIAN (France) said that, in view of the strong agricultural tradition it shared with Africa, his country had made agriculture the central focus of its development cooperation. Its primary aim was to ensure food security, by encouraging investment in agriculture and by fostering the development of products destined for domestic markets. Emergency food aid should not be confused with long-term food security policies, since only the latter could put an end to the recurring cycle of famine. For that purpose, an action plan against famine, especially in Africa, had been adopted at the recent Group of Eight (G-8) meeting in Evian. Productivity gains in agriculture were dependent upon access to technological progress and that, of course, included the possibility of using genetically-modified organisms, due regard

being had for the sovereignty of every State. In that connection, however, the precautionary principle, which recognized the need for comprehensive scientific analysis, should be respected at all times.

Agriculture was not a mere economic activity; it was connected both with biological balances and with the cultural traditions of a country. More than any other activity, it was at the mercy of forces of nature that were difficult to control. Governments thus needed to adopt an approach that was at once affirmative and pragmatic. That was reflected in the recent proposals made by the President of France to African leaders concerning the future of agricultural export subsidies, trade preferences for the sub-Saharan African countries, and issues relating to commodities and raw materials. The G-8 had followed up on those proposals by expressing its desire to enhance preferential trade regimes, strengthen technical assistance programmes and pay closer attention to the impact of fluctuating commodity prices on poor farmers.

The overall aim of such measures was to put an end to the exclusion of developing-country farmers from world trade. His Government was committed to fulfilling its obligations under the Doha Development Agenda, which was reflected in the recent reform of the European Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). The CAP had facilitated the modernization of farms throughout the European Union, as well as providing assistance to the most vulnerable. At the same time, European markets had retained a high degree of openness towards agricultural products from the developing countries. Duty-free access was granted to exports from the least developed countries, and Europe absorbed two thirds of all agricultural exports from Africa.

His Government fully supported the agricultural component of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), with its focus on integrated policies, local capacity-building and affirmative action. It had also increased its ODA allocation.

Mr. ESCUDERO (Ecuador), having welcomed the conclusions and recommendations contained in the report of the Secretary-General (E/2003/51), said that his delegation shared the concern to enhance the access of poor rural people to productive assets, especially since farming was often the only source of income for people living in rural areas. Over 75 per cent of rural communities in Ecuador lived in poverty, but his Government was

unable to channel more resources into agriculture, because of the burden of foreign debt repayments. The sector suffered greatly from the competition provided by heavily subsidized food imports from rich countries, as well as from poor infrastructure.

His Government was working to develop fresh synergies between the various sectors to promote rural development, emphasizing the need to ensure a more equitable distribution of resources. However, the trade-distorting impact of subsidy programmes in rich countries continued to minimize the impact of such efforts. With little more than two months to go before the Ministerial Conference in Cancún, little progress had been made in the WTO negotiations on the elimination of such subsidies and the conditions of access to the markets in developed countries. Without substantial progress on those issues, the Doha Development Agenda was doomed to failure. That would be not only a lost opportunity for promoting development but also a demonstration of the need for a global conscience to emerge to combat poverty effectively.

Mr. MEETOO (Observer for Mauritius) said that, while most of the responsibility rested with Governments to improve the living and working conditions of their people, a fairer international trading system was a prerequisite for the process. Developing countries needed market access for their products, as well as a mechanism to ensure the stability of commodity prices and of the balance of the terms of trade. He urged all members of the WTO to honour their commitments with regard to the implementation of the Doha Development Agenda.

In the experience of his country, a top-down approach to poverty reduction and rural development was not an efficient one. His Government had thus begun to pursue an integrated approach, with the emphasis on providing better access to education and credit facilities, so that the poor could be empowered to take part in productive activities. Poverty alleviation programmes had been reoriented to focus on community development, income-generating activities, and technical assistance.

A trust fund for the social integration of vulnerable groups had been set up to finance projects relating to social infrastructure, income-generating activities and student loans, while 150 million rupees had been allocated to a rural diversification programme, coordinated by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), which was designed to assist

microenterprises and community development. A national action plan for poverty alleviation had been formulated with the participation of various stakeholders, including the private sector, ministries and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The Government intended to review its national strategy, in collaboration with the European Union, in July 2003, and it remained fully committed to combating poverty and exclusion.

Mr. SHA Zukang (People's Republic of China) said that Governments should develop long-term rural development strategies, with a view to increasing input, strengthening infrastructure, raising living standards, eradicating poverty, boosting agricultural growth and promoting sustainable development. The agricultural sector should be given priority as a matter of strategic importance, and national action plans should adopt a realistic and pragmatic approach. His Government set great store by the rational use of natural resources, and advocated the use of environmentally friendly techniques, renewable energy sources and strong measures to address problems such as desertification and land erosion. Countries should strike a balance between agricultural development and environmental protection, which could be achieved through a combination of modern and traditional techniques. Social security systems and the provision of services in rural areas should also be made a priority.

An integrated approach to rural development in developing countries was dependent upon international cooperation. In particular, financial assistance should be increased, which meant that countries must honour their ODA commitments. The current system of international trade in agricultural products was unfairly weighted towards farmers in the developed countries. The market access barriers to exports from developing countries, as well as unreasonable subsidy programmes, must be eliminated during the forthcoming round of WTO trade negotiations. Capacity-building should be strengthened to provide developing countries with the means to develop infrastructure and human resources. The role of the United Nations was crucial in mobilizing resources and coordinating results-oriented activities.

Like other developing countries, China was faced with many agricultural and rural development problems such as a large rural population, a shortage of resources, inadequate infrastructure and low productivity. However, his Government had always attached the highest importance to agriculture and, following the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in 1992, it had formulated a viable sustainable development strategy. As a result,

agricultural production conditions had improved and advanced agrotechnologies had been introduced nationwide. At the same time, China had made vigorous efforts to build up and improve its rural management system, accelerate the development of towns in the rural areas and press ahead with the development of village and township industries. Managing to feed 22 per cent of the world's population with just 10 per cent of the world's arable land, China had blazed a truly national path to modernization uniquely suited to Chinese conditions.

His Government was taking steps to strengthen the position of agriculture as the foundation of the economy, further develop the rural economy and increase the income of its farmers. Because China was the largest developing country and a major agricultural one, the sustainable development of its agriculture was an essential component of global sustainable development. China had cooperated fruitfully for many years with international organizations, and stood ready to share its experience with the international community and work closely with other countries in a joint effort to eradicate poverty and bring about sustainable development throughout the world.

Mr. ALI (Observer for Bangladesh) said that approaches to development had changed over time in the light of experience. Success stories in one place could never be exactly replicated elsewhere because local conditions varied and specifically tailored policies were always called for. The current emphasis on reform and liberalization had not always produced the desired results, nor had the benefits trickled down to the most needy members of society.

Rural development was an overriding priority in Bangladesh and, accordingly, his Government had placed special emphasis on education, health and nutrition in rural areas. There could be no development without a proper rural infrastructure, which was why the road network had been expanded and a programme of rural electrification launched. Microfinancing had been notably successful and had led to a radical reassessment of the creditworthiness of the poor, thus enabling them to take charge of their own destiny. Despite all the Government's efforts, however, poverty remained endemic. The proportion of poor people in rural areas, calculated as a percentage of the total population, had indeed declined, but their absolute number remained

high. Opportunities for the poor were still limited. And external forces were often at the root of the problem: in many countries, agriculture was unable to contribute to rural development because the subsidies paid by the developed countries to their own farmers distorted international commodity markets.

The generally unfavourable aid and debt climate was another problem. ODA had fallen in real terms, and a crushing debt burden paralysed Governments' ability to release resources for competing needs. The multilateral spirit of cooperation was not as strong as it once had been. Many developing countries had recently been given an opportunity to shape their own development plans through PRSPs, but the whole initiative was unfortunately hostage to the vagaries of external economic forces. Furthermore, multilateral trade rules denied the developing countries adequate policy space to benefit from trade opportunities. Targeted intervention programmes were needed that would stimulate the private sector in developing countries to set up appropriate manufacturing units, particularly in rural areas, with a view to exporting their products.

Mr. MARINI (Intergovernmental Institution for the Use of Micro-alga Spirulina against malnutrition) said that the organization he represented, the depository for the Free Agreement for Cooperation in Scientific Research and Humanitarian Use of Micro-Alga Spirulina as Food and of the Convention for the Use of Food Micro-alga and Inter-University Scientific Research, was working to promote the transfer of new agricultural algal technologies and thereby dramatically reduce the numbers of hungry and malnourished people during food emergencies. The conventions provided for the establishment of a network of microalgae productive centres to produce microalgae biomass for humanitarian purposes. The edible microalga Spirulina had enormous and exciting potential as a nutritional supplement for famine victims and the acutely malnourished. It also strengthened the body's immune defences and could therefore play a key role in the fight against HIV/AIDS. He hoped that the issue of food microalgae for human nutrition and as a resource for dealing with food emergencies would become a familiar topic at future international summits on food security.

Mr. TIDJANI-SERPOS (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)) said that UNESCO fully recognized that education empowered people to fight poverty. Education programmes that helped the poor to articulate their needs obviously

had an impact on the public policies that affected development planning. Women's lack of access to education was a particularly serious obstacle to rural development, because education empowered women to make use of financial services and manage productive resources such as land and water. It was also clear that education had an absolutely crucial role to play in combating the HIV/AIDS pandemic through preventive campaigns and awareness-raising programmes.

The United Nations Literacy Decade (2003-2012), for which UNESCO was the lead agency, provided an opportunity to put special emphasis on literacy for all within a framework of universal education. UNESCO therefore called upon the international community, national Governments, NGOs and civil society to take immediate steps to increase their commitment to and investment in literacy for people in rural areas as a means of combating stubbornly high rates of poverty, low school attendance, student dropouts, adult illiteracy and gender inequality in education. Literacy should loom large in all national education policies and development strategies.

In addition, UNESCO was the lead agency for the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005-2014), the preparations for which were currently under way. The plan of implementation for the decade established connections between poverty alleviation, human rights, peace and security, cultural diversity, biodiversity, food security, clean water and sanitation, renewable energy, preservation of the environment and the sustainable use of natural resources.

Ms. FAIDUTTI (World Federation of United Nations Associations) said that the emerging global civil society had great potential but needed to be strengthened through cooperation with the United Nations system and Governments. The bottom-up work of grass-roots organizations should be complemented by the top-down efforts of Governments and international organizations. Women and young people should be fully and actively engaged in the rural development process. They should be empowered at the local level in order to promote a sense of ownership of the development process. Education, a key element in rural development strategies, extended beyond formal instruction and embraced all the values and

culture of a given society. New technologies such as the Internet had great possibilities for promoting education in the broadest sense, but in order for that to happen it would be necessary to eliminate the so-called digital divide.

Ms. SINGH (All India Women's Education Fund Association) said that her organization had been providing a holistic education to Indian women since 1929, focusing on broad issues such as health, nutrition and legal literacy.

A video presentation on the work of the All India Women's Education Fund Association then followed.

The meeting rose at 1.10 p.m.